SAN FRANCISCO COUNTY

Site name: Farallon Islands State Marine Conservation Area

Year established: 1991
Approximate Area: 13.3 nm^2 **Approximate Shoreline length:** 4.2 nm
Approximate Depth range (feet): 0 to 240

Habitat types: complex hard bottom habitat with varying degrees of relief.

Surrounding habitat types: A variety of complex habitats lie immediately adjacent to the MPA boundary. Farther to the east is the primarily soft-bottom portion of the Gulf of the Farallones. A short distance to the west, the continental shelf drops off rapidly.

Summary of existing regulations: Area closures prevent fishing within 300 feet of the shore of portions of Southeast Farallon Island and the four islets of the North Farallon Islands from March 15 through August 15 of each year. A five nautical mile per hour speed limit is in effect for all vessels within 1,000 feet of any shoreline of the above islands. Otherwise all other forms of legal take are allowed. Other restrictions currently limit recreational and commercial fishing in certain depths.

Primary objectives: This area was originally designated as an ecological reserve. Fish and Game Code Section 1580 (ecological reserves) states that "the policy of the state is to protect threatened or endangered native plants, wildlife, or aquatic organisms or specialized habitat types, both terrestrial and nonmarine aquatic, or large heterogeneous natural gene pools for the future use of mankind through the establishment of ecological reserves." Although the language does not specifically refer to ecological reserves in marine areas, the Fish and Game Commission has extended this policy to those areas.

The Farallon Islands were designated specifically to protect populations of nesting marine birds and breeding marine mammals from noise associated with vessel traffic. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) wanted to prohibit fishing within 1 mile of shore of all of the Farallon Islands year-round, but a compromise was reached with fishing interests and the Department to establish seasonal closures closer to shore around some of the islands.

Existing enforcement: Department enforcement vessels patrol the area. Staff from the Point Reyes Bird Observatory (PRBO) are stationed on Southeast Farallon Island, under an agreement with USFWS. They monitor wildlife populations, and can notify enforcement personnel of potential violations.

Baseline and ongoing monitoring and research studies: Monitoring of marine bird and mammal populations is conducted by PRBO staff and the Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary (GFNMS), with occasional assistance from the Environmental Protection Agency. PRBO has more than 30 years of data, beginning in 1971, on marine bird populations at the islands. Since 1993 GFNMS staff have been conducting intertidal surveys of invertebrate and algal populations three times a year. In 2005 GFNMS staff, in cooperation with the Partnership for Interdisciplinary Studies of Coastal Oceans, will establish a permanent intertidal monitoring station at Southeast Farallon Island. GFNMS staff have also conducted sporadic surveys of krill abundance in nearshore waters using hydroacoustic technology.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service maintains historical records of marine bird and mammal populations at the islands. The Service also has a data base of disturbance to these populations from vessels.

Basic Evaluation: Although technically an MPA, this site offers no additional permanent protection to subtidal marine organisms above and beyond the relevant Fish and Game regulations. The seasonal area closures afford a greater degree of protection to marine birds and mammals from the aspect of behavioral disturbances and may provide protection to nearshore subtidal species.

Published references related to effectiveness of this MPA: 149, 187
Unpublished references related to effectiveness of this MPA: 22, 32, 36, 48, 77, 135, 186, 192.
Published references related to use of this MPA as a research tool: 1, 2, 5, 64, 73, 88, 89
Unpublished references related to use of this MPA as a research tool: 147, 148